

## Long Time Coming



It probably wasn't that long ago that I was worrying about losing our snow pack before I had adequate opportunity to play in it, but it sure seems like it now. I don't know about you, but I found this weekend's snowfall to be totally demoralizing. It's not like we haven't ever had snow in April before, or even May, but I am simply not in the mood for it! Spring sure seems like it is a long time coming this year.

We were going to go for a little trip this weekend on account of the house is getting

kind of small and we are both getting sick of winter, but somehow after we had started out, we discovered that 2 of our 3 big dogs were not with us. I have heard about families that occasionally leave a child behind at a gas station or rest stop, and sort of wondered how that could happen, but I guess maybe now I know. I recall thinking things were uncommonly quiet in my old van, but I was going to let that pass. My husband must have thought so, too, because he actually turned around and checked, and sure enough – we were two dogs short of a full load.

When we got back home, the youngest dog was waiting for us in the yard, and the very best dog (mine) was coming up the road. Not one to wander, she must have gone to visit the neighbors after I snapped at her in the garage. I can't blame her; I go to visit these neighbors, too when things get a bit tense.

Recognizing that driving anywhere with a van load of dogs and two cranky people might not be the best medicine for cabin fever, I sent my hubby off to go fishing... all by himself. And do you know he had the nerve to thank me? As for myself, I spent the weekend looking for spring.

I looked for it a couple of times in the local café. There the people were all moaning about the snow, but at least we had somewhere to go besides sitting at home and whining to our loved ones. We could moan to new people. My favorite spot for a newspaper and a cup of coffee, it's a true hardship that this place closes in the winter. There is nothing better than a little early morning down time before you fly into your projects.

I looked for spring in my barn, but there currently is almost no life there. It should have been full of sheep, except that when the last kid left home I panicked at the impending lack of help and

sent the sheep away. Undoubtedly the most pampered sheep anywhere; I kept my 'babies' inside at the slightest hint of bad weather. A spring like this one would mean several weeks of woolly ewes and bouncing lambs locked up in a maternity ward that makes no uncertain statement about spring, despite the weather. Lambs are full of energy, and when you let them out they can't help but bounce around. One year for a kid's science project at North School, we took a video camera out and recorded and counted every bounce a lamb could produce. What a hoot! Now my barn sits full of boats and mowers and such and even the cats are unhappy. I wander around to friends who have young animals, and live vicariously through their farming adventures. Something has got to change.

I looked for spring in my chicken coop, and even brought in fresh wood chips from the mill up the road and turned on the lights to warm things up. But despite my desperation and the availability of chicks in town, I know it is foolish to start with this much snow on the ground. Where will the young birds go when it's time for them to go outside and all we have is snow or mud? So after two days of burning light bulbs, I shut them down. It was 15 degrees too cold in there for baby chicks, anyways.

I looked for spring while I drove around the Chippewa in search of open water. But it is still cold at night, and all the lakes and wetlands are locked up tight. The only open water I could find is that that's moving, and it still needs to be fairly sizable. There are a few waterfowl to be found in places like the larger rivers. Some trumpeter swans are gathering at Winnie Dam. One even flew over the house last week, but I think it was just hopeful.

Finally I put on a pair of snowshoes, and discovered just how good the going is right now. The crust keeps you on top and you can go darn near anywhere. I chose to take a little walk into a gravel pit not far from my place. A few years ago it was the home to a large batch of wolf pups, and I wanted to see if it was getting any use this year. There were two different size classes of pups and 11 pups in all, so although it's unusual, it is probable that there were 2 mothers in this pack. The even stranger thing about this situation was that there was an active batch plant in operation, which is one of the loudest and smelliest of operations you can imagine...hardly a pristine location in the wild, if you ask me. But these pups were used to it, and you could sit on a gravel pile in broad daylight and watch them. It isn't always easy living with timber wolves, as anyone who has ever lost livestock or a treasured family dog can attest. But to watch these pups was an experience I will carry with me forever.

I didn't find any sign of wolves in the pit that day. But it was a good walk, anyways. Mostly there was still plenty of snow, but every now and then in a spot that must get sun when it shines, you would find a patch of grass. Not really green, but at least it was not white! And somehow, I had not noticed that the willows have been brightening like they do in the spring. The yellows and reds of the stems are really rather dramatic if you take a moment to look. Although there aren't very many yet, some of the pussy willows have fuzzy buds showing. There were even a few red buds of maple starting to show. Darn few, but it's a glimmer of hope, when your heart aches for spring.

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